

ABCs of Being Smart...

M is for Motivation



Dr. Joanne Foster



In this column, marking the midpoint of the alphabet, and the 13th installment of the *ABCs of Being Smart*, my mission is to manage a mosaic of motivators while being mindful of the letter **M**.

Within this mix I include many mastery-oriented motivators (ones that lead mostly toward meaningful understandings), and other motivators that are also mobilizing but more mainstay (moderate albeit not mundane). Here are my musings.

Making the Most of Momentum

Motion – whether motivation is generated from within (*intrinsically*) or initiated from without (*extrinsically*), what's important is to take action—to marshal, muster, move!

Meaningfulness – make it matter. Learning opportunities should be relevant so kids can experience the kind of motivation that comes from personal engagement. Motivation is often associated with such triggers as need, instinct, curiosity, praise, or encouragement.

Memory – past experiences can motivate people by affirming what they know and can do, readying them for additional memorable challenges.

Marshmallows, M&M'S, Muffins – at a basic level, motivators might include candy, rewards, applause, or gold stars. (At a more sophisticated level, consider sparking interest, offering hands-on activities that are fun, setting tough but realizable goals, and fostering self-regulation.)

Monday Mornings – a downer or a fresh start? Depends on whether you have a motivated mindset...

Mindset – success depends on many factors, not the least of which are an attitude of perseverance and a willingness to confront obstacles. (This is known as a *growth mindset*.)

Maybe? – that’s too mild-mannered. Think, “Why not???” instead.

Match – expectations are more readily met when tasks and ability match. Parents can advocate for suitable programming matches for their children.

Marks - some kids are motivated by high marks, others by mediocre or even low ones. Help kids find their mark by offering a supportive emotional climate. (“You can do it! Hooray!”)

Mothers – no list of M words about motivation would be complete without mentioning mothers (and fathers) as major role models for their children.

Monitor and Modify – sometimes all it takes to motivate someone is to provide the right pacing, structure, focus, or feedback. In other words, respect the unique qualities of the individual.

More Momentum

Marvel – life is filled with myriad muddles and mind-boggling mysteries that motivated minds can help to mitigate. Be part of the movement!

Mountain Climbing – no, not everyone can scale monumental heights. But everyone *can* set manageable goals and work mightily to attain them.

Mentors - a mentorship can enable kids to acquire know-how, serving as a constructive way to learn and grow

Mix It Up – make things interesting, different, novel, rousing!

Music – A melody, minstrel, or movie can inspire. So can movement. And art. (Michelangelo!). Some might be in the mood for a little magic or merry make-believe, or meandering through a museum. What’s your pleasure?

Mythology – moving stories, folklore, legends, fables, and tales of yore—all offer intriguing and potentially inspiring accounts of a *mélange* of characters motivated by means of many miscellaneous methods...

Money/Marketability - an eye on the future, including career goals and financial stability, can be motivating, especially for adolescents and young adults

Meeting Others – chatting, co-creating, working together, and sharing ideas—all of this can be motivating!

Maximum Momentum

Mastery - there's joy and gratification to be had from understanding and mastery, which can lead to acquiring new skills, fueling motivation to accomplish even more.

Mistakes and Meltdowns – be mindful of using these moments. Help kids understand that flexibility and resilience are important, that wrangling success from failure is a learning process, and that they *can* find the fortitude necessary to keep going when demands and responsibilities become difficult.

Mavericks – let's encourage children to become frontrunners, find their way, and make a difference—by offering them guidance, and a strong moral compass.

Measurable – it's helpful when goals and interim accomplishments are not vague, when achievements are measurable and people can gauge their progress.

Metacognition – think about thinking, by engaging in and modeling inquiry and reflection. This directs attention, supports self-determination and autonomy, and is a means to an end.

Meteoric – forward momentum does not have to be dazzling. Maintaining balance, peace of mind, happiness, and well-being matter most.

Author's Note - Joanne Foster, EdD is co-author (with Dona Matthews) of the award-winning book *Being Smart about Gifted Education, 2nd Ed.* (2009, Great Potential Press), and *Beyond Intelligence: Secrets for Raising Happily Productive Kids* (2014, House of Anansi). She's a parent, teacher, consultant, researcher, and education specialist. Dr. Foster has more than 30 years of experience working in the field of gifted education. She writes extensively about high-level development, and has presented on a wide range of topics at conferences and learning venues across North America. She teaches at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Her book *Not Now, Maybe Later* (on procrastination) is forthcoming. You can visit her website at www.beyondintelligence.net or contact her at joanne.foster@utoronto.ca